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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to assess the effectiveness of oral language responses as predictors of the reading performance of intermediate-grade students. Responses were considered to be paradigmatic if they illustrated superordinate, coordinate, contrast, or part-whole relationships. Other responses were considered syntagmatic. Subjects were 52 fourth graders enrolled in a summer reading program in a Southern city. The California Reading Test, Form W, and the experiment-devised Oral P/S Language Inventory were administered to all subjects. A t-ratio was derived from the number of syntagmatic responses given by subjects. The results of the study indicate that it is possible to predict reading performance from the numbers of syntagmatic and paradigmatic oral language responses. It was concluded that, since reading tests make extensive use of paradigmatic word associations, instruction in word associations might improve children's scores. Tables and references are included. (MS)

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ORAL LANGUAGE RESPONSES AS A PREDICTOR OF READING PERFORMANCE IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES

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Bickley, Dinnan, and Bickley (1970) indicate that high syntagmatic scores from oral language responses parallel scores on group intelligence tests, that students who tend to give a larger number of syntagmatic responses score low on intelligence tests. Other studies indicate that close correlations have been found between association tasks and reading skills. Bateman (1963) reports that association tasks are consistent predictors of high level reading skills while Ohnmacht, Weaver and Kohler (1969) show that association tasks are closely related to general verbal ability. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of oral language responses as a predictor of the reading performance of students in the intermediate grades.

Ervin's (1957) classification of these oral responses as paradigmatic or syntagmatic was modified in the following way: responses that illustrated the relationship of superordinate

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(apple-fruit), co-ordinate (arm-leg), contrast (white-black), or part-whole (branch-tree) were accepted as paradigmatic. All other responses were classified as syntagmatic items.

The subjects were fifty-two fourth year public school pupils who were enrolled in a summer reading program in a southern city. The data were collected through administration of the California Reading Test, Form W and the Oral P/S Language Inventory. The thirty stimulus words which make up the Oral P/S Language Inventory were compiled from the Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald (1963, 1967) list of a basic communicating vocabulary.

The California Reading Test, Form W was administered in a group session early in the summer. The reading scores were arranged in the manner from high to low on the basis of a median split, with twenty-six subjects in each of two groups. The scores for the low group ranged from Pre-primer to 3.2; the scores for the high group were from 3.3 to 4.6. According to the California Reading Test, all of the subjects were reading at or below grade level.

The Oral P/S Language Inventory was administered shortly after the California Reading Test was given. The subjects were asked to listen to the stimulus word and to give the first word that came to mind as the examiner recorded the responses. The Inventory was administered individually and thirty responses were recorded for each subject. The responses were identified

as paradigmatic or syntagmatic items according to the classifications given earlier in this paper.

Figure 1

Oral P/S Language Inventory

1. in	11. high	21. poor
2. she	12. city	22. happy
3. go	13. war	23. hot
4. up	14. open	24. South
5. old	15. white	25. easy
6. day	16. morning	26. pretty
7. king	17. pay	27. against
8. life	18. laugh	28. wife
9. work	19. front	29. smile
10. father	20. short	30. foreign

A t-ratio was derived from the number of syntagmatic responses given by the subjects. The results of the analysis are given in Table I.

Table I

Data for the High and Low Reading Groups on Syntagmatic Language Responses

Group	Mean Syntagmatic Response	SD of Mean Score	Diff of Mean	SE of Diff	t-ratio
High Reading	10	8.23	5	2.23	2.24*
Low Reading	15	7.81			

*P < .05

The number of syntagmatic responses for the high reading group ranged from three to thirty with a mean of ten. The low reading group achieved scores that ranged from four to thirty with a mean of fifteen. The P/S Language Inventory in a test-retest reliability situation has a correlation of .78.

The results of the study suggest that one can predict a subject's reading performance on the basis of his oral language responses. A subject who gives more than fifteen syntagmatic responses will obtain a lower score on the California Reading Test than a student will who tends to give paradigmatic responses.

While these results suggest that perhaps one could easily develop his own quick (three-minute) informal reading inventory for the classroom, they would also seem to suggest the possible advantage of training children in the area of word associates. Since it is apparent that reading tests may make extensive use of paradigmatic word-associates, the ability to respond in this manner would certainly enhance the child's academic pursuits.

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